

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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R 211055Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8682

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 1603

LIMDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR ATHERTON AND SAUNDERS FROM LAMBRAKIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON AND THE "BIG PICTURE" IN THE MIDDLE EAST

REF: BEIRUT 708 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: THOUGH INSECURITY CONTINUES, CHANCES FOR

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RENEWAL OF GENERALIZED FIGHTING WILL REMAIN NEAR ZERO

AS LONG AS SYRIANS KEEP PRESSURE ON ALL FACTIONS AND PALESTINIANS COOPERATE IN ONE FASHION OR ANOTHER. THIS TIES LEBANESE SECURITY MORE CLOSELY THAN BEFORE TO LARGER ARAB-ISRAEL PICTURE. THE LEBANESE LEFT WING REMAINS DISGRUNTLED, THE CHRISTIANS SUSPICIOUS. HOWEVER CHANCES FOR RENEWED FIGHTING WILL RECEDE AFTER NEW PRESIDENT TAKES OVER IN AUGUST-SEPTEMBER. USG ATTENTION SHOULD THEREFORE BE CONCENTRATED ON GETTING SAFELY THROUGH INTERIM PERIOD UNTIL THEN. WE ARE LESS WORRIED ABOUT ULTIMATE SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON THAN BY POSSIBILITY OF BREAK-DOWN IN PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP LEADING TO OPEN CLASH IN WHICH NUMBER OF ACTORS COULD GET INVOLVED. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING CONSTITUTES CONTINUATION OF OUR COMMENTS ON LEBANESE CRISIS BEGUN JANUARY 22 WITH CONTRIBUTION TO SNIE (REFTEL). SUCCESSFUL SYRIAN INTERVENTION HERE, AND CHRISTIAN WILLINGNESS TO ABIDE BY NEW POLITICAL AGREEMENT, HAVE TEMPORARILY REDUCED CHANCES OF FIGHTING AGAIN BREAKING OUT IN BEIRUT TO NEARLY ZERO. THIS SITUATION SHOULD HOLD AS LONG AS SYRIANS MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON ALL LEBANESE ELEMENTS AND PALESTINIANS REMAIN ESSENTIALLY ALLIED WITH SYRIANS OR WITHIN SYRIAN ABILITY TO CONTROL.

2. THE CHRISTIANS OF THE RIGHT HAVE UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY DID NOT GIVE UP VERY MUCH IN NEW AGREEMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MOSLEMS OF THE LEFT REALIZE THAT THEY HAVE NOT WON VERY MUCH. THE ELEMENTS OF THE LEFT (AND THE DRUZE, IF THEY ARE NOT COMPENSATED IN SOME WAY) WITH JUMBLATT AS SPOKESMAN, CAN BE COUNTED ON TO BIDE THEIR TIME UNTIL OPPORTUNITY ARISES TO MAKE TROUBLE. WHILE THE UNEASY PEACE WILL BE MARKED BY CONTINUING INSECURITY IN BEIRUT AND COUNTRYSIDE, THIS IS NOT LIKELY TO LEAD TO MORE GENERALIZED OUTBREAKS OF FIGHTING EXCEPT PERHAPS IN THE BEKAA WHERE AN ALTERNATIVE MOSLEM LEBANESE ARMY UNDER RENEGADE MOSLEM OFFICERS COULD BECOME TROUBLESOME IF ALLOWED TO GROW.

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3. WITH CONTINUING CEASEFIRE SO DEPENDENT ON SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS, LEBANON'S FUTURE IS TIED MORE CLOSELY THAN EVER TO "BIG PICTURE" OF ARAB-ISRAEL RELATIONS. DISRUPTIONS IN THE PICTURE RISK RENEWAL OF FIGHTING IN THE LEBANON. WE ARE THINKING OF SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN CLASH, NEW ARAB-ISRAEL WAR, OR EVEN AN INTRA-PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE FOR POWER WITHOUT OTHER MAJOR FACTORS INVOLVED DIRECTLY.

4. THEREFORE TIME IS IMPORTANT. IF SYRIAN ATTENTION IS NOT DIVERTED FROM THE LEBANON, AND PALESTINIANS REMAIN QUIESCENT UNTIL AFTER LEBANESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN AUGUST, CHANCES FOR STABILITY IN THE LEBANON WILL IMPROVE CONSIDERABLY AT LEAST IN THE SHORT AND MIDDLE TERM. ONCE A NEW PRESIDENT IS ESTABLISHED IN POWER, AND THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS BEGIN OPERATING, MUCH OF THE POLITICAL AMMUNITION OF THE LEFT WILL HAVE BEEN DEFUSED. ASSUMING A START HAS BEEN MADE ON RECONSTRUCTION OF LEBANESE ARMY AND SECURITY FORCES, THESE HAVE A FAIRLY GOOD CHANCE OF CONTAINING ANY FURTHER OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE BEFORE THEY SPREAD. THE LEBANESE POLITICAL CONSENSUS MIGHT UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES EVEN WEATHER INTERNECINE WAR AMONG THE PALESTINIANS SHOULD THINGS COME TO THAT.

5. WE THEREFORE URGE THAT ATTENTION BE GIVEN TO THE SHORT TERM BETWEEN NOW AND NEXT SEPTEMBER. THERE IS ONLY ONE POLICEMAN ON THE BLOCK CAPABLE OF KEEPING THE LOCAL SITUATION UNDER CONTROL--THE SYRIANS. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE SYRIANS REMAIN (A) INVOLVED IN THE LEBANON AND (B) COMMITTED TO THE SPIRIT OF THE 1969 CAIRO ACCORDS, I.E. KEEPING THE PALESTINIANS OUT OF LEBANESE POLITICS. AS LONG AS THOSE TWIN CONDITIONS ARE MET, IT SEEMS PROBABLE THAT THE CHRISTIANS WILL GO ALONG WITHOUT A MAJOR FUSS. LEBANESE MOSLEM CONSERVATIVESMRILL SIMILARLY FOLLOW WHERE OTHER LEAD. EVEN THE DISGRUNTLED MOSLEM LEFT (WITH ITS CHRISTIAN SPLINTERS AND REJECTIONISTS) IS LIKELY TO REMAIN QUIESCENT -- OR BE SUPPRESSED IF IT DOES NOT.

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LIMDIS

6. THUS, STABILITY OF LEBANON IN THE NEAR TERM DEPENDS TO A LARGER DEGREE THAN EVER, AT LEAST IN RECENT PAST, ON CONTINUED BENEVOLENT INTERVENTION BY THE SYRIANS AND NON-INTERVENTION BY OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES. LIBYAN AND IRAQI TROUBLE-MAKING CAN BE CONTAINED; THEIR MONEY CANNOT ALONE BUY A DANGEROUS LEVEL OF VIOLENCE. EGYPTIAN TROUBLE-MAKING IS OF A DIFFERENT DIMENSION. ONE CAN NEVER SELL EGYPT'S RESOURCES SHORT, AND CONSTANT MONITORING WILL BE NECESSARY. HAPPILY, SAUDI ARABIAN INFLUENCE APPEARS FIRMLY COMMITTED ON THE SIDE OF STABILITY. THIS FACTOR SHOULD BECOME EVEN MORE IMPOR-
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TANT AS LEBANESE (AND THEIR SYRIAN FRIENDS) FIND THEMSELVES INCRESASINGLY INTERESTED IN LARGE SUMS OF MAONEY FOR RECONSTRUCTION. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT SAUDIS, KUWAITIS, AND ABU DHABIANS EXPRESS CONDITIONS FAVORING STABILITY WHEN THEY PUT UP THEIR MONEY. (UNLESS EMBASSY DAMASCUS TELLS US OTHERWISE,) WE THINK SYRIAN PRESTIGE SHOULD ALONE BE ENOUGH TO KEEP SYRIANS BENEVOLENTLY ENGAGED HERE UNTIL FALL PROVIDED OTHER ARABS (AND ISRAELIS) KEEP OFF THEIR BACKS.

6. THIS EMBASSY AT LEAST IS NOT OVERLY WORRIED ABOUT ULTIMATE SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN THE LEBANON. IT IS ONLY REALISTIC TO WORRY ABOUT INTENTIONS INsofar AS SITUATION PERMITS THOSE INTENTIONS TO BE REALIZED. WE DO NOT FORESEE CHRISTIAN POWER IN LEBANON FALLING TO LEVELS WHICH WILL PERMIT PERMANENT SYRIAN TAKEOVER. THE ISRAELI THREAT AND ANTI-SYRIAN ARAB RIVALRY PROVIDE FURTHER SAFEGUARDS. NOR DO WE SEE LEBANESE GOING ALONG WITH

CONFRONTATION-SATE STANCE IN ANYTHING BUT APPEARANCE.
WE THINK IT WOULD BE UNDER-ESTIMATING SYRIAN LEADERSHIP
TO BELIEVE IT DOES NOT APPRECIATE THESE FACTS OF
LIFE. THIS SEEMS TRUE AS LONG AS PRESIDENT ASAD IS IN
CHARGE OF SYRAIN POLICY. WHILE EVERYTHING THE SYRIANS
DO MAY NOT BE HELPFUL HERE, THEIR ESSENTIAL ROLE AS
POLICEMAN IS. WE MIGHT TAKE SOME COMFORT IN THE
THOUGHT THAT SYRIANS HAVE TOO MUCH OF THEIR REPUTATION
AT STAKE IN LEBANESE STABILITY TO BE ASSOCIATED,
WILLINGLY, WITH A FAILURE.
LAMBRAKIS

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